



Montgomery County Council

For Immediate Release

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COUNCIL'S OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT MAKES RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN EFFORTS TO PREVENT SALES OF ALCOHOL TO MINORS

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The Montgomery County Council's Office of Legislative Oversight today released its report on how the county enforces laws prohibiting sale or service of alcohol to people under age 21.

The County uses compliance checks as one of several strategies to combat alcohol use among persons under 21. Compliance check operations involve sending in underage buyers to attempt purchases of alcohol from retail establishments.

OLO recommends the County act to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of its compliance check program. Specific OLO recommendations concern improving inter-agency coordination in the planning and conduct of compliance checks, more timely follow-up with establishments that are found selling alcohol to a minor, and enhanced publicity about the program and program results.

According to the most recent county police statistics of compliance checks, underage buyers are able to buy alcohol 38 percent of the time. Although this is below the national average of 50 percent, it still means that licensed establishments in the County are not consistently checking ID and refusing to sell alcohol to persons under 21.

"Preventing young people from purchasing alcoholic beverages saves lives," said Councilmember Phil Andrews, chair of the Council's Public Safety Committee. "The county needs to send a clear message: establishments that sell alcohol to young people especially repeatedly should face swift certain and severe punishment."

(more...)

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The OLO report identified “waves” of compliance checks as establishing a more effective deterrent than single, one-time inspections. The report also points to jurisdictions that impose stricter penalties on repeat offenders. In Montgomery County, most first and second offenders pay a fine; in comparison, second offenders in Virginia face a 10-day mandatory license suspension.

To further reduce sales of alcohol to underage persons, OLO recommends that that the County consistently deliver timely penalties to establishments that serve and sell alcohol to underage persons. To that end, OLO urges that the Board of License Commissioners take administrative action against violators within 100 days of the incident. In addition, OLO recommends the County-owned liquor stores that sell alcohol to a minor face penalties comparable to those faced by private retailers.

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